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## DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT,

WITH

*HISTORICAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERY IN IOWA.*

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BY SAMUEL STORRS HOWE,

*Convener of the State Synod of Iowa.*

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DELIVERED, OCTOBER 19TH, 1882, IN THE CENTRAL PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF DES MOINES, THE CAPITAL OF IOWA.

**H**ERE opens a most sublime subject of Apostolic discourse. The chief Apostle to the Gentiles, in writing to the Galatians, contrasts the giving of the law by Moses, and the dispensation of the Spirit by Jesus Christ. The law was given through the ministration of angels—"twenty thousand as at Sinai"—amidst lightnings and thunderings, the very rocks, as modern travelers relate, showing marks of the fires of heaven to this day. In the sublime language of Habakkuk, that wonderful old

prophet, "God came from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran. The everlasting mountains were scattered. The perpetual hills did bow. His ways are everlasting." So terrible was the sight, that Moses himself did exceedingly fear and quake. Thus glorious was the giving of the law, written by the fingers of the Almighty on tables of stone.

But how much more glorious was the giving of the Gospel of Jesus — more wondrous still, as written in the fleshly tables of human hearts — THE DISPENSATION OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, that, in the beginning, brooded over this formless, shapeless globe itself, at the creation!

"'Twas great to speak the world from naught,  
'Twas greater to redeem."

Such was the glorious Gospel of the Holy Spirit, and the giving of the Holy Spirit of Promise by Jesus Christ — the word and Spirit working on the spirits of men throughout the world. In the language of our excellent Confession of Faith, God, the Holy Spirit, proceeding from the Father and the Son, "works with means, without means, and above means," with the power that God wrought when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead, raising dead souls to the life of godliness, regenerating new-born souls, creating them anew in Christ Jesus, causing a new creation, a new birth, and eternal life in this world under condemnation of the law that works death. In the words of John Calvin: "*When God works in man, the man himself acts.*" One Almighty, Eternal Holy Spirit working on the spirits of mortals — spirit on spirit. For man is not a clod of clay nor a stone, nor a dead carcass in religion, to be moved as dead matter, or as a machine. But God, the Holy Ghost, works that mankind may work out salvation from sin. Especially in infants does God, the Holy Spirit, work by His spiritual power, so that more than half the human race, such as die in infancy, are formed and fashioned anew, as belonging to our fallen nature, and fitted for heaven. And thus Christ, by the operation of the Spirit, changes the fallen nature of more than half the human race, and makes salvation in heaven possible for more than half the wide world.

God, the Holy Ghost, thus works above or without means on infantile hearts, fitting them wonderfully for heaven.

But ordinarily God, the Spirit, works by means of His providence, as among the heathen, and by His written, revealed word, wherever the "glorious Gospel of the blessed God" comes, changing mankind into His own image, as from glory to glory.

Indeed, the gospel is a Spirit-giving dispensation. Such is the subject, most sublime, selected for this memorable occasion, upon the consolidation of the Synods of Iowa, North and South into one great, grand Synod of this State. Let us dwell on it and upon some historical recollections growing out of this apostolic theme of present discourse.

I. *That we might receive the promise of the Spirit.* The gift of the Holy Spirit to our world is a matter of special prophesy and of promise and of prayer. The prophet Joel predicted: "It shall come to pass, in the last days (under the Gospel Dispensation), that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh (that is, on Jews and Gentiles), and your sons and daughters shall prophesy" or speak under the influence of the spirit. This prophesy was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, after the immediate disciples of Christ had continued fifty days in prayer. Thus miraculously was the spirit poured out upon all nations, beginning at Jerusalem: "Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and dwellers in Judea, and Capadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, Phrygia and Paphlagonia, in Egypt, and in parts of Syria and Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and Proselytes, Cretes and Arabians heard the Apostles speak the wonderful words of God."

II. The Holy Spirit was a matter of promise, by Christ, to His disciples. At that last sad conversation with them before He suffered on the Cross, He said to them, sorrowing over His departure: "It is expedient that I go away; for, if I go not away, the Comforter (Paraclete) will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you." And as Christ was sent into the world by God the Father, so the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit into the world, in all ages, to administer the kingdom of God, or the kingdom

of Christ, or the kingdom of heaven, one and the same reign, to the end of time,—a spiritual reign of the Holy Spirit among all nations. This promise began to be fulfilled on the day of Pentecost, when three thousand were converted in a single day. It is the Spirit of God working on the spirits of men in all ages. Such is the sublime subject here presented to view by the great Apostle of the Gentiles, better suited to a volume than to a brief discourse on this synodical occasion.

It is very common to preach on faith in God and in His word. It is more common still to preach on faith in Christ as the only Savior of lost men, but who are the men in the pulpit, in the lecture-room, in the Sabbath school, everywhere and on every occasion, that preach faith in the Holy Spirit of Promise; who make everything of the Spirit in preaching the Gospel of God, or of Christ the Savior of the world? Both ministers and common Christians are constantly praying about *it*, as an influence to be poured out, instead of praying to God, the Eternal Spirit, that is in the world, convincing of sin, opening the heart to the truth as He did the heart of Lydia, “to attend unto all things spoken by Paul,” the Apostle. They talk of the Spirit of Promise as it, instead of He, “the Spirit of Truth,” that has come into the world, and is now administering to mortals the kingdom of Christ, since He has risen and ascended on high. There is a practical unbelief in God, the Holy Ghost, who has come in the place of Jesus Christ.

For example, some learned divines, years ago, were travelling in a packet on the Erie Canal, and deliberately discussing the condition of the heathen, without instruction in the Bible; and they really questioned among themselves whether it was possible for them to be converted, since there was no word in their language for God, or Christ, or the Spirit—often, as is the case; just as if God Himself, who made the souls of all men, put spirits within them, could not find access to the creatures He has made. Away with such want of faith in the Spirit of Promise! God create the spirit of man, and not be able as the Spirit, omniscient, omnipresent, and eternal, to find access to His own child, however

debased and degraded! The success of Christian missions for the last fifty years, in which a nation of Sandwich Islanders have become Christians—a nation born in a day; the conversion of the inhabitants of Madagascar, christianized by tens of thousands, where, but a few years ago, a savage queen butchered all Christian subjects in her power; the conversion of the benighted and degraded Hottentots of South Africa, where a chief from the interior came with a drove of cattle and other gifts to buy a missionary; the conversion of the Hindoos of India and the breaking down of the adamantine walls of China, where a native came a long journey of three months to find a Jesus Christ man, and embraced the faith of Jesus and of the promised Spirit, upon the first hearing of the old Gospel story, exclaiming, “This is the very Savior I need!”—these and many other proofs exist that God, the Spirit, is everywhere and in every place, working with the almighty power which He wrought when He raised Jesus Christ from the dead, and is worthy of all faith by all men, as the administrator of the kingdom of Christ on earth, since He has arisen and ascended to His throne in the heavens. Indeed God, the Holy Spirit, works by the overruling providence of His realm of the universe. Yet He usually works by the word of truth itself. He is called by Christ Himself “The Spirit of Truth”—the very conservator of the truth in the Universal Church on earth, throughout the wide world. He leads and guides His people into all truth. He takes the things of Christ Himself, and shows them unto men, in all ages and in all lands. All the light of the ages has come from the Spirit. Even the illumination of the minds of Socrates, the prince of the Greeks, and of Cicero, the chief of the Romans, as well as the old Bible prophets, is from Him, who said, “Let there be light at the dawn of creation,” and light was. The very prophets themselves “spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The word of God “is the sword of the Spirit”—a two-edged sword, dividing asunder the joints and marrow, and He is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

But who is sufficient for such a ministration of the Spirit?

The Apostle to the Corinthians says expressly: "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God, who also hath made us able ministers of the New Testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life." "But if the ministration of death, written and graven in stone, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance, which glory was to be done away, how shall not the ministration of the Spirit be rather glorious? Now, the Lord is that Spirit." For "the law came by Moses, but grace and truth by Jesus Christ." The law was given by the ministration of angels, but the glorious Gospel of the blessed God by the Spirit-giving dispensation—"The Spirit of Promise," "received through faith."

Such, in the conversion of men, of all conditions and of all nations, is the almighty power of God the Holy Ghost in producing the moral changes of the wide world,—in the revival of His work,—His wondrous work of awakening and convincing men, one by one, by tens and thousands, wherever the glorious Gospel is preached with faith in the promised Spirit. So, without a miracle, the conversion of the world to Christ is to be accomplished, and the Spiritual millenium (the only millenium I believe in) is to appear, when the kingdom of God shall indeed come; and "the knowledge of the Lord shall fill the earth, as the water covereth the sea."

Such is the glorious reign of the Holy Spirit — the Dispensation of the Spirit through the Gospel.

III. This Dispensation of the Holy Spirit is a matter also of prayer. Christ has taught that God is more ready to give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. Christ has Himself promised the Spirit. He has set an example of praying all night, doubtless for the Spirit, given Him without measure, to sustain His human nature without sin amidst the temptations of Satan and of a wicked world, and amid the woes of lost and ruined men. And why should not we, as "able ministers" of the New Dispensation of the Holy Spirit, pray

and preach the word, sowing "the incorruptible seed of the word," beside all waters, till the dews of Divine grace and the rain of righteousness shall descend and water the whole land, like "the River of God?" The great Nile of Egypt overflows and renders that land most fruitful of the finest of wheat. The farmers of Colorado and of the other Rocky Mountain States and Territories of America irrigate, with water-courses, that otherwise barren portion of our country. And why not Christ's ministers, elders, and all the people pray for the Holy Spirit, that first brooded over the waters of this entire globe itself, till all nature, and all tribes of animals in sea, and land, and air, and mankind sprang full-formed into being, so that God Himself pronounced His own handiwork good and glorious? Yet how much more glorious the work of the Holy Spirit, in renewing and reforming souls ruined by the fall!

Such is our glorious ministry under the Spirit of Promise. Why, then, should we not seek to carry salvation to perishing mortals, for whom Christ died and the Spirit strives? In season and out of season, why should we not give ourselves to prayer and the ministry of the word, we ministers, and elders, and deacons, and members of the Presbyterian Church—the largest Protestant denomination of Christians in the whole world—every man, woman, and child of us? Why not pray, and work, and wait, and watch for souls as those that must give account at the great day—for which all other days were made—terrible account for those who bring no souls with them saved by Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit of Promise, of prophecy, and of prayer, home to glory?

But, as I have said, the Holy Spirit not only inspires prophets and apostles, but ordinarily uses the word of God, as He opened the heart of Lydia to attend unto the things spoken by the Apostle. "Paul may plant and Apollos water; but God giveth the increase." An eminent illustration of the word and Spirit going together occurs to mind. The Rev. Dr. Levi Spaulding, of Ceylon, more than thirty years ago said to the Synod of Utica, New York, in relating the



first revival in India, among the heathen: We were praying at our annual meeting for a revival, as in our fatherland refreshings were multiplied all over the United States. We all kneeled to the Father of all Spirits, and prayed Him to move our pupils and congregations by His Spirit. One after another prayed and wept before God, till all broke down in silence. On our return the first school of girls we reached was moved by the Spirit, in advance of our coming. The school-rooms, the sleeping-rooms, and even the stairs were filled with praying and weeping daughters of heathenism, begging God to make them Christians. So quickened were we missionaries and all others by the Holy Spirit of Promise that we thought of going right out among the untaught and untutored heathen with the fire of the Spirit, but we soon found that this fire would not lap up such a sacrifice. Take a single instance of a Persian girl, of whom the late Dr. Coan spoke. He overheard her praying with much entreaty, thus: "O Lord Jesus, have mercy on me! Pity, O Jesus, a poor Persian girl! I'm a poor sinner. Didst Thou not come to save sinners like me, and die even to save? Do, Lord, help a poor, weak girl!" Then (as if remembering that she was a woman by sex, always in heathen lands degraded and despised) she said: "But didst Thou not regard, O Lord, the Syro-Phenician woman, who said to Thee 'the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' tables?' Didst Thou not heal the woman that but touched the hem of Thy garment? Didst Thou not raise Jairus daughter? Didst Thou not raise Lazarus from the dead, the brother of Mary and Martha, and weep over his grave?" Reciting each case, she begged: "Lord, though I am of the sex a woman, deign to take compassion on me!" And He did, and she is now among the savage Koords of the mountains, telling them of Jesus.

And now, beloved brethren of the Synod of Iowa, be entreated to pray for the Spirit; be filled with the Spirit. Be like Stephen, the first Christian martyr, men and women and children "full of the Holy Ghost." Set your heart on a revival of pure and undefiled religion, like the first eight

pioneer ministers, who, with their wives and their children, crossed the Mississippi to found Presbyterian churches here in Iowa, composing old Des Moines Presbytery, among whom I stand before you the very last one living on Iowa soil. There was William W. Woods, my predecessor in the Stone Church of Iowa City, who made much of religious efforts under the Spirit; who promoted the revival at Kosuth (Yellow Springs), which "broke out" in the midst of the first meeting of the Presbytery I attended in Iowa. Several young men were then and there born of the Spirit, hopefully; and some of them are here as good ministers of Jesus Christ. Oh! we had revivals then in Presbyterial meetings. And it was worth going around the globe to witness such a blessing in a Presbytery.

And there was William H. Williams, who rode the length and breadth of Iowa on horseback, with his overcoat and umbrella tied on behind his saddle, to preach Jesus, especially to children, as he was a teacher, who closed his life in good works of the Gospel in Hendersonville, North Carolina, where he went with a consumptive son. They lie together. He wrote me once (I have the letter now) how he went without breakfast, on foot, to preach, across the River Des Moines, in the edge of Missouri, at a time when the crust of ice and snow broke under him at every step. His address was particularly to the young, "Take fast hold of instruction, for she is thy life." Good brother! He was very good and dear to us all, and *to me especially*.

There was Gamaliel C. Beaman, a graduate of Andover Theological Seminary—a missionary, first, like W. W. Woods, in Indiana; and then, in Montrose, Iowa, opposite Nauvoo, Illinois, that plague-spot of Mormonism. The Mormons stole his good horse, saddle, and bridle on their way through the wild tract to Kanessville, now Council Bluffs. Then he founded the church at Croton on the Des Moines River, where, during the the late civil war, he stood by his home, with his rifle in hand, to keep off invaders from Missouri—the hero of two wars—but, most of all, the warrior with the world and the flesh and the devil!

There, too, was good brother Thompson Bird, who founded the church we now meet in. He also was a graduate of Andover Seminary and a missionary in Indiana, who came here in 1848, and lived in a barrack of the old fort, by permission of the United States officer in command, during the first winter, till he built a log cabin; and as he wrote me, had "one room only, so snug and warm as not to freeze his feet." But he did freeze his hands riding over the prairies. And, by "close packing," he got forty hearers in it for preaching, by putting the children on the bed. He had a church of seven women and one man, not suitable for a ruling elder, almost literally fulfilling the prophecy of Scripture, that "Seven women shall take hold of one man to be called by the name of Christians." Father Bell, of the other branch of our church, said he had no church, because he had no elder in it. He came on horseback to Des Moines Presbytery, at Kossuth, crossing the Chicaqua as best he could, and inquired whether he indeed had a church in our estimation, a true church, and was assured that a church always existed before an election of elders, since there must be a body of believers composing a church, before they could choose an elder.

Mr. Bird was our pioneer, or western-most missionary in 1849; and the American Home Missionary Society Agent thought it almost a waste of money to sustain him here. Yet, see what God wrought through him by His Holy Spirit, in this now the Capital city of Iowa! The first wooden church edifice erected here cost toil and sacrifice. The pine lumber was hauled on wagons from the Mississippi River, and cost over a hundred dollars a thousand feet. But to return to his early privations and sufferings! He went to Presbytery in Cedar Rapids, all the long, weary way, on foot, and so blistered his feet that the skin came off with his socks; and the blessed good mother in our Israel still lives there who furnished warm water and clean stockings for him, almost fulfilling the Apostle's words: "Hath washed the disciple's feet." The brethren made up a purse and sent him home in the stage. May she long live, like the "big woman" of old, who had a prophet's chamber, and set a little

table and a candlestick for the man of God, who came often that way. For, good women, as oft as ye have done this, or even given a cup of cold water to a disciple, ye have done it unto Christ. Never let Bible hospitality die out in our Church and community, with the big houses and hotels of these times. Remember, that if God did not then, as now, make great houses and many rooms in this western wilderness, He did make a plenty of hazel thickets in which to go aside a while and pray, and keep the heart with all diligence.

Then there was Williston Jones, of Cedar Rapids, who laid the foundations of the Presbyterian church there, all equipped with stoves and bell. He was wont to scour the Cedar Valley with his mules (a very unscriptural rig, I must say); and he was never satisfied if he did not see sinners all the time converted. He used to wear down a span or two almost every year. He lies in his grave in Missouri. He went straight from a protracted meeting to the Savior, with these words on his dying lips: "May they all be converted!"

But last, and not least, in our eight, was John C. Ewing, who deceased at Winterset. He was lovely as John the Apostle. O my brother, O my six brothers in the Lord, you were precious to us, to me especially, as the last comer to Iowa of you all! God, the Holy Spirit, keep ward and watch over your sainted dust, till Christ, at the first resurrection, shall bring us all up, as well as those that shall then be alive, to His heavenly kingdom. Blessed Spirit, that buried Moses, be the guardian of us all, and bring us home to the heavenly mansions!

And what shall I say more? These all died in the faith of the promised Spirit. Time would fail me to speak of the worthies of the other branch of our now united Church and now consolidated Synod.

Fathers Cowles and Bell deceased, and Rev. E. Mead of Davenport, and Rev. James D. Mason, who still live, like Rev. Dr. Glen. Wood, who early left our Iowa field for Illinois, founding the Church, and building the first edifice at Keokuk free of debt.

And, as old John Knox was wont to pray, "Give me Scotland or I die!" so may we all pray, give our great State of Iowa to Christ. Iowa, grown from forty thousand to a million and two-thirds since the present *Convener* of this State Synod first spied out this goodly land, in 1839 and 1840; and since he has lived at Iowa City, now the thirty-third year of his pilgrimage in this once "howling wilderness," inhabited by wild Indians and wild beasts and birds of prey.

Let Presbyterianism, the friend of liberty in Church and State, a form of religion "without a bishop" (such as the Roman Catholic, Protestant Episcopal, and the Methodist Episcopal Churches have); and a State without a king—a Church with a written constitution and charter of our liberties—a Church in which the Michlenburg confession of faith and civil liberty arise before Thomas Jefferson ever penned the Declaration of Independence. But I mistake when I say no bishop; *we are all bishops* by our book, with equality in the ministry. Let us, then, magnify our office. Let error and infidelity, and bold, mocking atheism die out of our commonwealth and nation, while we preach the truth, by the aid of the Spirit of Promise. "The Spirit makes easy work," once said a ruling elder years ago. It is easy to pray in the Holy Ghost; it is easy to preach with the Spirit breathing on the preacher and the people, and giving sovereignty to the word of God. So George Whitfield and the Wesleys preached in England; and hundreds were converted in a day. So Jonathan Edwards and Davis and other Presbyterian worthies and evangelists, such as Nettleton in the Congregational order, preached and many believed. Nor has lay agency ever been wanting, good elders and deacons, standing as the body-guards of our ministry, while our whole sacramental host has followed the Captain of our salvation, and the leadings of the Holy Spirit, for as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the Sons of God.

But the field is not only Iowa—"the field is the world." Give it all to Jesus Christ and to the Holy Spirit, who is now administering the kingdom of heaven among men, in the place of the risen and ascended Lord. Let the world be

“regenerated, redeemed, and disenthralled” from sin and Satan; and He who has a right to reign, reign over all nations. One man, full of the Holy Ghost, shall chase a thousand, and two put ten thousand enemies of Christianity to flight. Let all our institutions become schools of the blessed Spirit. Too long has our branch of the Christian Church been counting up the people of God, and been cursed like David in numbering the people. It is not by the might of numbers, but “by My Spirit,” saith the Lord, that victory is obtained. He can save by few or many.

Our Church, too, in common with other branches of the general Church, have been fighting atheism and infidelity, that has lately descended to the lower classes, as it was formerly prevalent among the higher orders of society. “Let them alone — the blind leaders of the blind: and if the blind lead the blind, they both shall fall into the ditch.”

There is a restiveness in ministers and churches. They want to introduce liturgies, as Dr. Hodge advocated in Princeton before he died. And, since, Prof. Hitchcock of Union Seminary, New York, Prof. Hopkins of Auburn Seminary, and many lesser lights in the Presbyterian Church are following suit, all being unmindful that the prayers of Moses the man of God, the psalms and the prayers of David and of Habakkuk—in short, the prayers of Christ and His Apostles and martyrs, the Bible itself, is the best prayer-book. Payson knew how to pray, said a man of the world. Then comes the uneasiness on account of the sound Calvinism of our Confession of Faith—“the guilt of Adam’s sin”—and all that, not knowing that “guilt” has two senses, criminality and liability to the consequences of other’s sins.

The peace and quiet of the whole Church is thus disturbed, and the true basis of sound doctrine undermined. Let them alone, but preach the Godhead of Christ and the Godhead of the Holy Spirit. Preach and pray for a revival of pure and undefiled religion in all our churches. Set your hearts on it. Do not give up faith in the promise of the Spirit, but hold out as ministers and elders and people—make a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull altogether, for the

Spirit of God, and the word of God and the providence of God are all ministered by that same Spirit of Promise.

Now, be entreated, as by Paul the aged, by the example of inspired men and women of the Old Dispensation and of the New Dispensation of the Gospel; by blessed martyrs; by the worthies of all later ages; by the example of the dead and living among us, to be filled with the Spirit. Consider the love of the Spirit. It is He that loves to make you sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. Read Philips' Love of the Spirit.

Consider how Christ has loved the Church and sent the Holy Spirit to perfect a Church without spot or wrinkle. Love and labor for the Church. Give for its enlargement and establishment—the Church, which is His body, who died for it. Make sacrifices for it. Said a merchant in St. Lawrence county, New York, who repaired the Presbyterian church of Fort Covington and was congratulated thereon: “It is worth while to work hard to have something to give.” Take church expenses and Presbyterial and Synodical apportionments as a necessity of the existence of the Church, the Presbytery, the Synod, and of the General Assembly to the Lord's table, if no ordinary time will move the people. Plead for the Church over the emblems of the body and blood of Christ, that He may fill you with all the graces and fruits of the Eternal Spirit, that you may abound in every good word and work, and serve Christ and your generation to the end. Die with your armor on and with the Holy Ghost in your spirit.

I have now done with the sublime subject of the Apostle—the Dispensation of the Spirit. O, Spirit of the living God, this once bless the words of the chief Apostle, that we may receive thee, thou Spirit of Promise, through faith!

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